

## Corps changes assignment policy for Okinawa-bound Marines

By Sgt. Jason Anderson  
United States Marine Corps

**H**eadquarters Marine Corps has changed the assignment policy for tour lengths for Marines going to III Marine Expeditionary Force or Marine Corps bases in Japan.

The standard will now be a 36-month tour with family members or a 24-month unaccompanied tour.

The phase-in plan will occur over several years, with full implementation expected by 2008. Details of how the policy change will occur are being finalized by Manpower Policy in Quantico, Va.

Officials expect some adjustments will need to be made during the process to ensure the transition is smooth and minimally disruptive to service members and the support infrastructure on Okinawa.

Although the policy change will not increase the number of Marines assigned to III MEF or MCBJ, it will likely increase the number of family members.

"We are committed to developing a common sense phase-in plan that will be sensitive to the welfare of Marines and their families," Hagee said. "We will ensure that the supporting infrastructure such as schools and housing can accommodate an incremental family member increase."

This policy change does not affect assignments under the Unit Deployment Program, which makes up about 30 percent of Marines serving within III MEF.

Marines currently assigned to Okinawa will not be affected. The criteria for who will receive orders under the new policy is still being finalized.

"As this policy change is being phased in, Marines with dependent family members will be given the option of accepting 36-month tours to III MEF or



Gunnery Sgt. Blair A. McClellan

**An Okinawa-based Marine trains Bangladesh Army personnel in non-lethal tactics. Changes in Corps policy may require Marines assigned to Okinawa to spend two to three years there.**

MCBJ accompanied by their family members," said Maj. Larry Bauer, military assignment policy analyst. "Only those who elect unaccompanied orders will be assigned for a 24-month tour."

Numerous quality-of-life initiatives and better living conditions have occurred on Okinawa over the last 16 years. These include improved housing and a full range of professional, social, travel, education and recreational opportunities. As a result, life for Marines and their families there has improved dramatically.

In addition, the increased Cost-of-Living Allowance provided to members serving tours with family members has significantly eased the financial burdens incurred by living overseas.

## Congress creates DoD National Security Personnel System

*Legislation reforms Pentagon's decades-old employment policy*

House Armed Service Committee  
Press Office

**C**ongressional negotiators have concluded work on legislation to create a National Security Personnel System for civilians in the Department of Defense.

The provisions creating the NSPS are contained in H.R. 1588, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, which was agreed on Nov. 6 by House-Senate conferees. The legislation sets policies, programs and funding levels for the nation's military.

"The legislation is a key step in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's effort to transform the Pentagon into an agency better able to meet today's diverse national security threats," read a joint statement by Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-CA), head of the Armed Services Committee, and Congressman Tom Davis (R-VA), chairman of the Government Reform Committee.

"The new system will bring the Department into the 21st century and allow [the DoD] to recruit the best and the brightest civilian employees," they added.

The National Security Personnel System established in this bill will provide the secretary of defense agility in hiring, firing and promoting a more responsive workforce.

Specific provisions include the following:

■ **Merit-based system** – The bill establishes a system that includes hiring based on merit, fair treatment without regard to political affiliation, equal pay for equal work, veterans preferences and protection for whistleblowers.

Employees will be involved in developing the new system, which will be prescribed by regulations issued jointly by the secretary of defense and the director of the Office of Personnel Management.

■ **Collaborative processes** – The new system ensures the inclusion of employee representatives in planning, development, and implementation of a new human resources management system.

A separate process to ensure that employee representatives participate in a new labor-management relations system.

■ **Performance management system** – The new system includes a fair, credible and transparent employee performance appraisal system that provides for adequate training and retraining and ongoing performance feedback.

■ **Staffing flexibilities** – The bill gives the secretary of defense addi-

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**Duncan Hunter and  
Tom Davis**

*U.S. Congress*

tional flexibility in establishing qualification requirements, recruitment and appointments to positions.

The secretary also has greater influence over assigning, transferring or promoting employees and reducing staff and grade levels.

■ **Increased SES pay caps and pay pool protection** – The bill increases the cap on total annual compensation for Senior Executive Service employees to the level of the vice president's total annual compensation.

■ **Appeals process** – The bill establishes an independent review process that will ensure fair treatment in appeals regarding employment-related decisions.

■ **Early retirement program** – The bill creates a program under which up to 25,000 employees a year will be eligible for voluntary early retirement annuities, separation pay to leave the service voluntarily, or both, for purposes of reducing or restructuring the workforce.

■ **Hiring of experts** – The bill authorizes the secretary to hire up to 2,500 highly qualified personnel with uniquely critical technical, scientific and management skills at appropriate pay for up to five years.

■ **Rehired annuitants** – Similar to existing authority permitting retired military personnel to work for the federal government without any offset to their retirement pay, the bill extends such authority to rehired civil servants who join the DOD civilian workforce.

■ **Alignment** – The bill provides that allowances and benefits to civilian employees working in particularly hazardous or specialized activities overseas are comparable with those of the Foreign Service and the Central Intelligence Agency.